COMMUNITY-BASED

Fish and Wildlife Work Plan

Vuntut Gwitchin Traditional Territory 2013-2018

COMMUNITY-BASED FISH AND WILDLIFE WORK PLAN FOR THE VUNTUT GWITCHIN TRADITIONAL TERRITORY 2013–2018

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On the front cover: Old Crow Aerial View, ©*VGFN* and Summit Lake Cairn, ©VGFN

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Introduction

WHAT THIS PLAN IS ABOUT

This fish and wildlife work plan attempts to coordinate the efforts of the planning participants to address local concerns about fish and wildlife in the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation (VGFN) traditional territory. It is part of the ongoing co-operative approach to fish and wildlife management within the VGFN traditional territory. This plan was developed by Vuntut Gwitchin government (VGG), North Yukon Renewable Resources Council (NYRRC), Yukon government (YG), and Parks Canada (PC), referred to as the planning participants. It is intended to be implemented between 2013 and 2018.

One or more of the planning participants has been identified as the lead for each proposed work item. This was done with the best available knowledge of existing resources in mind. Implementation of the proposed work is subject to the management priorities and budgetary constraints of each planning participant.

Photo: Upper Ts'iivii Shuhnjik (Timber Creek). © *VGFN 2011*

HOW THE PLAN WAS DEVELOPED

The plan was developed through the following steps:

- The *North Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Plan 2000-2005* was reviewed and tasks to be carried forward were identified;
- New fish and wildlife management concerns and related information were compiled;
- Issues and concerns were discussed at a community dinner and open house held in March 2006;
- The second draft work plan was developed and presented to the community in June 2007;
- Completion of the plan was deferred, due to changes in structure of these work plans, until January 2012 when the planning participants met in Old Crow to review the draft and make updates;
- The final work plan was produced and distributed in March 2013.

STRUCTURE OF THE PLAN

The plan groups important issues or concerns into four main sections: Populations and Monitoring, Human-Wildlife Conflict Management, Harvest and Education, and Habitat. Each section of the plan contains:

Current Issues
This section provides a description of concerns and issues from the community. Topics may relate to fish and wildlife populations, habitat, harvest, and/or may identify information gaps.

Proposed Work
This section reflects the discussion at the planning participants meeting in January 2012 and includes rational for the proposed work. Also noted is the planning participant(s) who may lead the work.

Priority Issues

PRIORITY ISSUES

The planning participants identified four areas of priority through the planning process:

1. Examine current harvest trends for moose and look at the need for population monitoring in the Porcupine River survey area. All planning participants should be involved in discussions on timing and survey areas.
2. Complete a reivew of the human-wildlife conflict response protocol to detail how conflict situations will be handled in Old Crow. The current protocol is not clear to local residents.
3. Work to increase trapping opportunities in the VGFN traditional territory. Promote the use of Old Crow furs both locally and internationally.
4. Continue the harvest monitoring program and refine as needed.

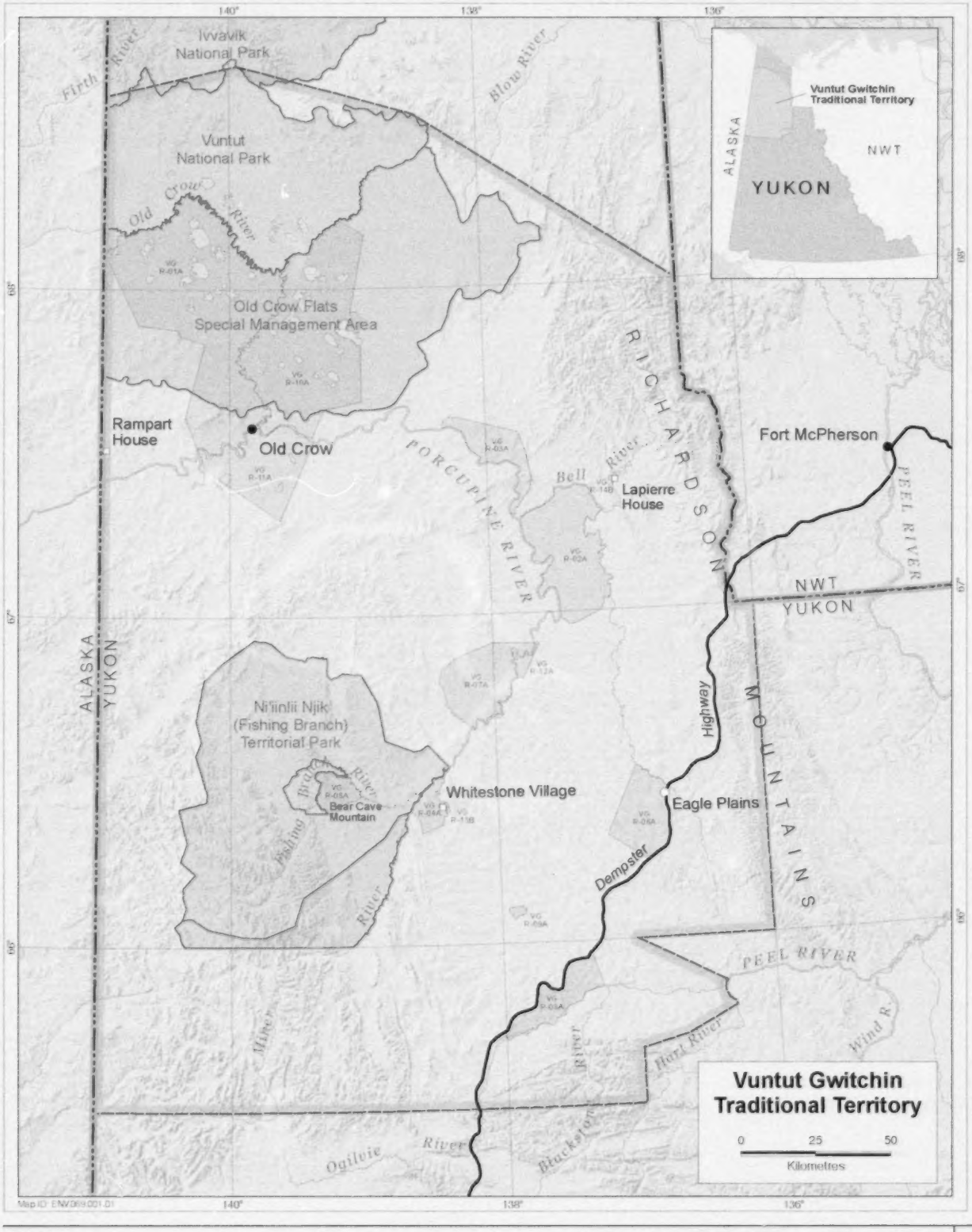
Notes about the Porcupine Caribou Herd:

This work plan does not address issues related to the Porcupine Caribou herd. These issues are addressed through the Porcupine Caribou Management Board, a joint management board established under the Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement (1985). The board consists of eight members representing six signatories; Government of Canada, Government of Yukon, Government of the Northwest Territories, Inuvialuit Game Council, Gwich'in Tribal Council, and the Council of Yukon First Nations.

Photo: Crow Flats, © VGFN 2011

PRIORITY ISSUES

Figure 1. Vuntut Gwitchin Traditional Territory



Populations and Monitoring

MOOSE - *DINJIK*

CURRENT ISSUES

Moose are a very important subsistence species and there is a desire to have good information about their populations within the VGFN traditional territory. Old Crow community members rely on moose meat for food, especially when caribou do not migrate near the community. There is a desire to maintain a healthy moose population and to have enough information to make good management decisions.

Information on harvest trends needs to be collected to learn more about the pressure on moose in the Porcupine River area. Harvest trends are important to understand the pressure on moose and the likelihood of changes to the population.

Surveys help to confirm any changes suggested by what is seen in harvest trends and there is a need for long-term, regular monitoring of moose. Surveys are expensive and only a few can be conducted annually throughout the Yukon. This work will need to be considered in the context of Yukon wide moose inventory priorities. The Porcupine River area was last surveyed in 2003.

The survey area used for moose should be re-examined given recent information on moose movements. Moose studies conducted during the International Polar Year Yeendoo Nanh Nakhweenjit K'atr'ahanahtyaa (IPY YNNK) project showed that some moose in the Little Flats region moved into the moose survey area along the Porcupine River in mid to late winter. The IPY YNNK moose project is near completion, with a habitat suitability model due to be completed spring 2013. This model will identify areas in the Old Crow Flats where moose are most likely to occur based on habitat conditions. Further discussions between the planning participants on the need and feasibility of extending the survey area to include the Porcupine River area are needed.

There is also an interest from local residents in conducting moose body condition monitoring. This type of work requires a commitment from hunters and could be incorporated into a community monitoring program.

Photo: IPY Study, Old Crow, *Bill Carmen*

MOOSE - *DINJIK*

PROPOSED WORK

YG/VGG/NYRRC: Look into the harvest trends and activities on the Porcupine River moose population to assess the need for population monitoring and/or survey.

YG/VGG/NYRRC/PC: Determine if the current survey boundary is appropriate given new information from IPY YNNK study on moose movements.

VGG/NYRRC/YG: Consider including moose body condition data when collecting harvest information from hunters.

VGG/YG/NYRRC/PC: Continue to assemble results from the IPY YNNK study. This data will be useful for the planning participants to gain a better understanding of the Old Crow Flats, including moose population health and determine where information gaps exist.

International Polar Year:

The International Polar Year project, Yeendoo Nanh Nakhweenjit K'atr'ahanahtyaa (IPY YNNK) was one of the 56 IPY projects funded by the Government of Canada between 2007 and 2009. The YNNK was lead by the Vuntut Gwitchin government in collaboration with Environment Yukon, Parks Canada and a multi-disciplinary team of southern-based researchers. The aim of the study was to collect information on environmental change in the Old Crow Flats and how these changes may have impacted the residents of Old Crow.

BIRDS - *DZHII*

CURRENT ISSUES

Populations of a number of bird species may be in decline in the region. There have been numerous studies conducted on migrating waterfowl in the VGFN traditional territory.

In 2012 VGFN and the Yukon Research Centre (Yukon College) completed a study on Crow Flats. Field work was based in the same area of the flats where similar work was conducted 40 years before. Crow Flats is the largest wetland complex in Yukon. Focal species included birds of prey (Peregrine falcon), gulls and shorebirds, riparian song birds and waterfowl. The study also included looking at changes in vegetation phenology, species diversity, and the physical environment. Initial findings indicate that hatching dates for all focal species had changed. Observations also indicate that in 2012 species that were recorded as "common" historically were either rare or missing, in particular the Red-throated loon, Greater Scaup, and Long-tailed duck.

The impacts of climate change on waterfowl habitat and decreasing water levels in the Old Crow Flats are ongoing concerns for community members. There is a desire to further understand how these changes will affect bird populations in the region.

PROPOSED WORK

VGG/NYRRC/YG/PC: Request all work completed to date on waterfowl in the VGFN traditional territory from CWS and DUC. These results will inform the planning participants on population health and where data gaps exist. This information will also be made available for local residents.

Photo: Green-winged Teal, *Cameron Eckert*

SHEEP - *DIVII*

CURRENT ISSUES

The North Richardson Sheep population is small, isolated, and may be susceptible to both natural and human caused disturbance and other factors that could cause numbers to decline. The most recent population estimate (completed in 2010) is 699 animals, indicating a stable population. In 2004 VGG took the lead in developing a Management Plan for Dall's sheep in the Northern Richardson Mountains. This draft plan addresses concerns related to this population, however the plan needs to be finalized.

PROPOSED WORK

VGG/NYRRC/YG: Complete the Management Plan for Dall's Sheep in the Northern Richardson Mountains. The planning participants involved in the management plan will aim to finalize the plan early in the implementation of this work plan.

FISH - *LUK*

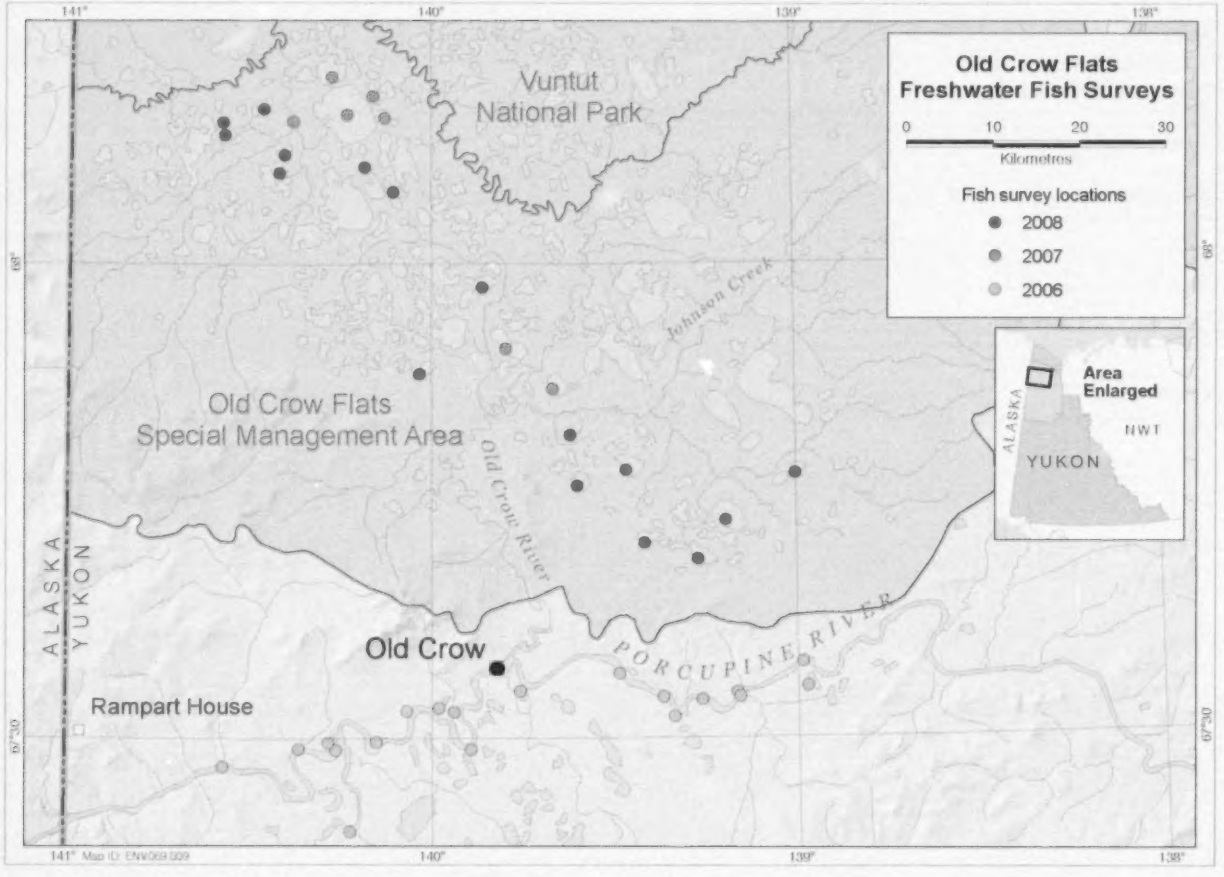
CURRENT ISSUES

Concerns have been raised about the waterbody where the community sewage lagoon is discharged. There is a concern that excessive nutrient outputs could negatively impact the aquatic habitat and species.

There are three small lakes located near the Village of Old Crow. There are concerns that these lakes may be spawning habitat. There have been fish fry observed in the waterbodies and the community is interested in gaining further information regarding what type of species are using these lakes and how to make sure their habitat is maintained.

Fish studies were completed on a number of lakes in the VGFN traditional territory in the summers of 2006, 2007, and 2008. The studies determined the distribution of freshwater fish in selected lakes, rivers, and streams. Results from this work indicated that there are no biological concerns regarding fish in any of the selected lakes at present.

Figure 2. Freshwater Fish Inventory Surveys , 2007-2009



FISH - *LUK*

PROPOSED WORK

VGG/YG: Determine if the levels of nutrient output are of concern. If so, assess risk to aquatic species (fishes and benthic invertebrates). Work with other partners to identify possible solutions.

VGG/YG: Investigate the three lakes near the Village of Old Crow to gain further information on the presence of fish species.

Photo: Fish and Net on the Porcupine River, © *VGFN 2011*

Human-Wildlife Conflict Management

PROTOCOL

CURRENT ISSUES

The current human-wildlife conflict management protocol is not clear to local residents. Because there is no Conservation Officer stationed full-time in Old Crow, the initial response to urgent human-wildlife conflicts falls to local organizations such as VGG, Parks Canada and the RCMP. As a priority issue to be addressed in this plan, the planning participants will complete a review of the current human-wildlife conflict response protocol and determine how it is best applied in the VGFN traditional territory. From this review the specifics of how this protocol will be actioned in the community will be outlined. This work will aim to identify roles of all potential respondents so community members have a better understanding of how to deal with human-wildlife conflicts and who is available to deal with these situations. In addition to this work, there is a need for more education on how to avoid conflict with wildlife, to stay safe, and better understand human-wildlife conflict situations. Some species to be addressed include grizzly bears, black bears, wolves, and foxes.

PROPOSED WORK

VGG/NYRRC/YG/PC: Complete a reivew of the human-wildlife conflict response protocol to better detail how urgent situations will be handled in Old Crow. Species included in the protocol include bears, wolves, and foxes.

Photo: Fox, *Afan Jones*

WOLVES - *ZZHOH*

CURRENT ISSUES

Wolves in and around town continue to concern local residents. As part of the harvest monitoring program, harvest and sightings of wolves are recorded. In the last few years there have been wolves around the community and these situations need continued attention and solutions. In 2012 YG and the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board completed a joint review and update to the 1992 Yukon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan. This updated plan sets out a management framework for wolves in Yukon and reflects current Yukon community perspectives on wolf management, including addressing wolf-human conflicts in communities. Input from the community of Old Crow was included in the updated plan. Implementation of this plan, including developing wolf-human protocols that are community specific, will require engagement and consultation with VGG and the NYRRC.

PROPOSED WORK

VGG/NYRRC/YG/PC: Continue to record sightings and frequency of sightings of wolves through the harvest data program.

BEARS

Black Bears - *Shoh zraii*

CURRENT ISSUES **There have not been a lot of issues or incidents with black bears in the last few years.** Most incidents that have occurred in the past were related to the Old Crow dump, however these concerns will be addressed in the new Waste Management Plan that VGG is currently working on. Bears continue to be attracted to drying fish and fish camps, however this is common knowledge and local residents are aware and take measures to avoid conflict.

PROPOSED WORK **At present there is no proposed work associated with black bears, however black bears will be included in the human-wildlife conflict response protocol described on page 14.**

Photo: Black Bear, *Cameron Eckert*

BEARS | Grizzly Bears - *Shih*

CURRENT ISSUES

Grizzly bear populations need to be maintained in the traditional territory existing protected areas, which include Ni'iinlii'Njik (Fishing Branch), Vuntut National Park, Old Crow Flats Special Management Area (Van Tat K'atr'anahtii), as well as proposed protected area such as Whitefish Wetlands, and Summit Lake-River. Ni'iinlii'Njik (Fishing Branch) is one of the areas in the VGFN Traditional Territory that is protected because of its unique cultural and ecological values. Extensive traditional knowledge has been recorded by Vuntut Gwitchin about the significance of Ni'iinlii Njik and the grizzly bears that congregate in this area each fall to feed on spawning salmon. Bear Cave Mountain Eco Adventures (as part of the Vuntut Development Corporation) provides opportunities for people to photograph and view grizzly bears in the Fishing Branch Ecological Reserve.

There are ongoing concerns about grizzly bears on the Dempster Highway. More grizzlies are becoming habituated to humans and human activities such as caribou hunting in the area. Hunter-grizzly bear interactions are increasing and there is concern about behavioral changes in grizzly bears such as forming associations between gunshot sounds and gut piles.

PROPOSED WORK

VGG: Continue to promote wildlife viewing opportunities of grizzly bears in existing protected areas Ni'iinlii'Njik (Fishing Branch), Vuntut National Park, and the Old Crow Flats Special Management Area (Van Tat K'atr'anahtii). Consider wildlife viewing opportunities during management planning for Whitefish Wetlands and Summit Lake-Bell River protected area.

YG, VGG, NYRRC, PC: The planning participants should work together to come up with solutions for grizzly bear and hunter interactions along the Dempster Highway. There is a need to involve other interested parties to find a lasting solution.

Harvest & Education

HARVEST MONITORING

CURRENT ISSUES

Harvest monitoring of many animals including moose, waterfowl, muskrats, beavers, sheep, fish, bears, wolves, wolverine, is an integral part of wildlife management. Many local residents in the VGFN traditional territory rely on wildlife for subsistence and traditional use. In the VGFN traditional territory harvest monitoring is conducted by VGG for VGFN hunters and trappers and by YG for licensed and non-resident hunters, and licensed trappers. Harvesting by VGFN hunters constitutes the majority of wildlife harvesting in this traditional territory. NWT and other Yukon First Nation members also hunt in VGFN traditional territory for caribou, though permission to hunt any other species must be given by VGG. Ongoing collection of this harvest information is important for effective wildlife management of many species.

PROPOSED WORK

VGG/NYRRC/YG: Continue to collect harvest data on moose, caribou, and sheep. YG will work with VGG and NYRRC to refine the VGG monitoring program as needed to make it more efficient and consistent when making harvest management decisions. Collecting accurate harvest information is important for ongoing monitoring.

Photo: Elizabeth Kaye cutting fish at camp below Jakl'it on the Porcupine River with Jeffrey Peter, © *VGFN 2011*

TRAPPING

CURRENT ISSUES

There are ongoing concerns about the feasibility of trapping in the VGFN traditional territory. Fewer people are trapping due to high fuel prices and low fur prices. Local residents are concerned that trapping skills are no longer being passed on to youth. Trapping is a traditional method of harvest and people are concerned that this cultural activity may be lost.

There is a desire to maintain and expand the community-based initiatives that support and encourage trapping. For example, the Vuntut Hunters and Trappers Association (VHTA) are working on ways to encourage people to get out on the land. The VHTA has long-term plans of developing a small industry in Old Crow that would produce traditional textiles through cooperation between trappers and artisans. Also, VGG has created a trapper assistance program which provides trappers who have completed the trapping course and hold a valid trapping license with $700 annual pre-season grub stake to help defray the costs of fuel and trapping supplies.

There is still a lot of confusion regarding when a commercial trapping license is required. Section 16.4.5 of the Umbrella Final Agreement states that "Subject to Laws Of General Application, unless otherwise specified in a Yukon First Nation Final Agreement, Yukon Indian People shall have the right to give, trade, barter or sell to any person, any Non-Edible By-product of Fish and Wildlife that is obtained from Harvesting of Furbearers." Section 16.4.2 is another relevant section and refers to Subsistence Harvest on Settlement Land or on Crown Land, to which Yukon Indian People have right of access. These and related statements create confusion as they establish different terms than trapping for "commercial purposes", which requires a Yukon government trapping license and compliance with Yukon government trapping regulations.

PROPOSED WORK

VGG/NYRRC: Initiate a program to promote the local use of local fur. This may include purchasing furs from trappers, tanning furs, and making them available to local crafts people such as the sewing group.

VGG/NYRRC: VGG will initiate a program to teach youth about trapping and help to get youth out on the land.

YG/VGG/NYRRC: Provide local residents with more information on trapping regulations and continue to provide trapping courses in Old Crow.

EDUCATION & TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

CURRENT ISSUES

Continuing to provide courses, training and cultural workshops in Old Crow is a fundamental part of fish and wildlife management. Making sure local residents have training opportunities, as well as the planning participants providing periodic updates on work being completed in the VGFN traditional territory gives community members a forum to contribute to management processes. These initiatives are currently lead by VGG, NYRRC, YG, PC, Chief Zzeh Gittlit School and Alice Frost Community Campus (Yukon College).

Traditional knowledge plays an important role in community education as it is knowledge gained from first hand experience on the land and teaches youth about VGFN culture. It is acknowledged by all planning participants as being an essential component to wildlife management and should be used in all proposed work described in this plan whenever possible.

Concerns raised by local residents that could be addressed with periodic information sessions include updates on population levels, health and habitat of local species including waterbirds, moose, caribou and fish. Training and workshops on safety around bears, human/wildlife conflict, firearm choices, and shooting techniques and how to avoid meat wastage would be beneficial to address any of these concerns.

PROPOSED WORK

VGG/NYRRC: Encourage and provide a forum to teach local residents traditional skills such as Choo Vadzaih Drin (Big Caribou Days) which is an ongoing heritage workshop. VGG and the NYRRC will continue to hold culture camps for youth.

YG/VGG/NYRRC: Share information and results of programs and research with the community.

YG/VGG/NYRRC: Continue to provide courses about bear safety, hunter education and ethics, and trapping.

VGG/NYRRC/YG: Provide educational opportunities for youth on best hunting practices and shooting techniques which would help to decrease wasted meat.

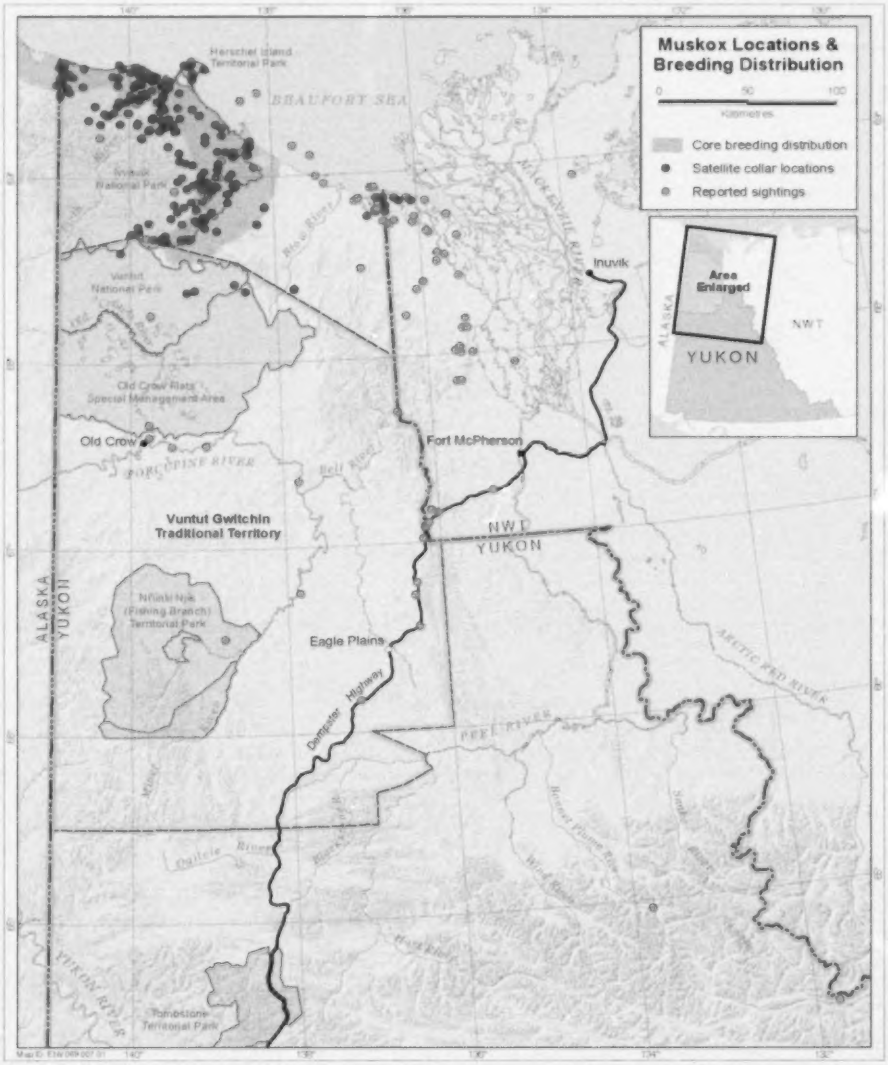
VGG/YG: VGG will initiate a community hunt in Old Crow. The program would allow elders to take youth out on the land together to teach them about hunting technique and to pass on traditional knowledge.

MUSKOX - *NIN DAGHAN CHOO*

CURRENT ISSUES **Old Crow residents are interested in learning more about muskoxen.** Community members are interested to learn more about muskox behaviour, biology, how to act around them and if they can be hunted. The Yukon North Slope Muskox Co-management Plan written by the Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope) is in draft, and the council expects to have the plan finalized in 2013. This plan was written for the North Slope Inuvialuit Settlement Region, but recognizes that muskoxen occur in adjacent areas, including in the VGFN traditional territory, Alaska and NWT.

PROPOSED WORK **VGG/YG: Provide community members with information on behavior, biology and about how to act and remain safe around muskoxen**

Figure 3. Muskox Locations & Breeding Distribution



Habitat

HABITAT

CURRENT ISSUES

There is ongoing concern about the impacts of environmental changes and the changing water levels in many of the ponds and lakes in the VGFN traditional territory. These concerns were raised about the many important areas in the Old Crow Flats. The Old Crow Flats Special Management Area Management Plan was completed in 2006 and was reviewed in early 2012. Monitoring of environment, natural resources and culturally important areas within the flats is an ongoing priority. Donut Lake, Tack Lake, Effie Lake, Horseshoe Lake, Fish Lake (Cadzow Lake) are all traditionally important lakes within the VGFN traditional territory. These lakes should be monitored and ecological integrity should be addressed when concerns arise.

The planning processes for Whitefish Wetlands and Bell Summit Lake-River will begin in 2013. Both of these areas were identified in the North Yukon Regional Land Use Plan as important habitats for caribou, moose, fish and many other species. Throughout the planning process the designated working groups will identify if data gaps exist and will gather information from local residents as well as conduct field work to further understand the ecological values of these areas.

Parks Canada monitors changes to several aspects of Vuntut National Park ecosystems. This work includes monitoring lakes (including water chemistry and algae sampling), forest ecology, permafrost, snow and tundra vegetation plots. Parks Canada also continues to run a number of weather stations within the VGFN traditional territory, recording temperatures and snow depths. Ongoing monitoring such as this is important in understanding and documenting environmental change over time.

The planning participants would like to collect all monitoring work completed in the VGFN traditional territory including IPY YNNK projects. This would assist in identifying where long term monitoring protocols exist and if there are any current data gaps. This process would also help to make sure ongoing monitoring work is coordinated and efforts are not duplicated.

Photo: River Beauty on Vihsraii Njik (Cody Creek). © *VGFN 2011*

HABITAT

There are concerns about Crow Mountain and increases ATV traffic in the area causing damage to sensitive caribou habitat.

There are also concerns that the current Air North flight path and schedule for fuel delivery in the fall is impacting the caribou behaviour and migration due to the frequent flights and loud engine noises.

Off road vehicles (ORVs) continue to be a concern due to increased access to remote areas, habitat disturbance and damage, and noise disturbance to wildlife in various areas through the VGFN traditional territory. The most recent place of concern is the Drown Lake dam. Overuse of the trail near the Drown Lake dam has lead to the dam becoming damaged. The dam will need to be fixed and alternative trail routes will be needed.

PROPOSED WORK

VGG/YG/NYRRC: Review and consider a community monitoring project using examples from existing programs.

VGG: Discuss scheduling of the fall fuel delivery with Air North to decrease disturbance to caribou.

VGG/NYRRC: Discuss mitigation measures for the Second Mountain road and traffic to decrease disturbance to caribou.

VGG/YG/NYRRC/PC: Compile work completed on existing monitoring in the VGFN traditional territory, including work completed during IPY YNNK. These results will inform the planning participants where data gaps exist and coordinate ongoing monitoring programs. This information should then be made available to local residents.

VGG/YG/NYRRC: VGG will complete an assessment of the Drown Lake area and bring any concerns and possible solutions forward to the other planning participants.

VGG: Discuss concerns and possible solutions regarding ORV activity on Second Mountain with community residents.

Work Plan Review

REVIEW

The planning participants will undertake two reviews of the 2013-2018 work plan. The first, an informal mid-term review will happen early in 2015, and will determine progress made on the plan and identify any needs to adjust the focus of the plan. The second more thorough review will happen in 2018 following completion of plan implementation. At that time the planning participants will identify the work that was completed and the work that was not completed and why. This information will be used to define and describe any further work that may be needed. Depending on the outcome of this assessment, the planning participants may choose to proceed with a follow-up work plan to address outstanding, ongoing, or new concerns and possible work. Results of both reviews will be made accessible to the community, either through local newsletters or public meetings.

This plan is intended to identify and address fish and wildlife concerns and to facilitate the cooperative management of fish and wildlife populations and their habitat in the VGFN traditional territory. As such, and through mutual agreement, the planning participants may agree to modify or refocus this work plan to address new information or management direction at any time during plan development or implementation.

Photo: *Eritrichium splendens*, Showy Forget-me-not, *Bruce Bennett*

VUNTUT GWITCHIN
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